



# The Tri-National Prespa Park in Albania, Greece and Macedonia (FYROM): Using Environment to Define the New Boundaries of the European Union

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## **The Tri-National Prespa Park in Albania, Greece and Macedonia (FYROM): Using Environment to Define the New Boundaries of the European Union**

### Abstract

*This paper is based on a study of the natural park created in 2000 on the territory of Albania, Greece and Macedonia (FYROM). Since then, the Prespa Park has always been presented as a successful model of cross-border cooperation in a region characterized at that time by its high level of instability. The creation of the park appeared both as a possibility to test re-drawn neighbours' relationships as well as rural and environmental management in a remote and problematic border zone of the European Union. A dialectic relation links those two aspects and needs to be analysed. On one hand, in the context of the reduction of support aid brought on by the Common Agricultural Policy in an enlarged union, the EU's local development programmes based on environmental management may be simply a lesser evil. On the other hand, the EU integration process is a high stake issue for national authorities, and the Prespa Park may be considered as a first step toward a more efficient use of EU tools in rural matters. The meeting of stakeholders of different levels around a negotiation table in order to give life to a cross-border natural park is one thing. The revitalisation of a common territory torn to pieces is something else. Does the formal recognition of a common natural heritage make sense in social, economic and politic life on the borders?*

## **Introduction**

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One of the most important arguments for the implementation of an environmental protection project in a problematic border area lies in the apolitical character of nature: when an economic gap or a political issue divides two countries, it may seem easier to deal with bears' migration paths than with peoples' migration strategies. Nature can play this role because morality and science have separated their fields of action. So, nature seems to be a

neutral object on which scientists of different countries can argue and dismiss any political recuperation attempt with scientific arguments.

But everyday life seldom supports this theoretical prospect. Being a source of goods, nature is already a political object.

Nevertheless, our tradition remains confident in the objectivity of natural studies. The conclusions of the international conferences in Rio and Kyoto gave to scientific studies a higher moral role and entitled them to inspire some rules, and this attitude leads us to believe that there is always a "good" or a "bad" way to manage other natural objects such as trans-border rivers and migrating animal species. The "good" way is supposed to improve the quality or quantity of the natural good considered, not only in terms of its social uses but also in terms of ecosystems.

This attitude is analysed in this paper which deals with environmental cooperation between Albania, Greece and Macedonia on the border zone of the Prespa lakes.

### **Figure 1**

## The Prespa Park between Albania, Greece and Macedonia (fyrom)

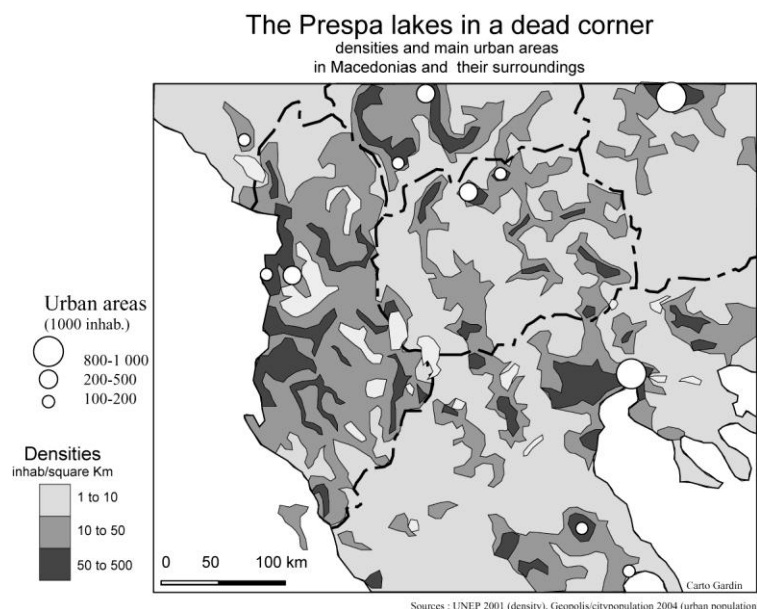


Italy EU Member State Croatia EU Candidate Country (situation in 2006)  
Every State or the area have signed the Stability Pact for Southern East Europe in 1999

The interest of this field study relies on the absence of both big ecological and economic stakes in the area. Lost in a dead corner of the three states, on a distant boundary of the European Union and located within a mountainous rural area, Prespa lakes provide an example of an environmental cross-border protection programme without important economic stakes. This is also a chance for scientists: the beauty of the so called "natural" landscapes of

Prespa gives to the area an important economic potential for "green tourism" and therefore a high degree of legitimacy for environmental protection.

**Figure 2**



On the contrary, the issues that handicap the area are essentially political: the construction of national states at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the progressive dismantling of the Ottoman empire gave birth to exceptionally tense territorial and cultural oppositions in Macedonia: a huge area in the heart of the Balkans that was ultimately divided mostly between Greece and Serbia, smaller parts being given to Albania and bigger parts to Bulgaria. The Greek civil war of 1947-49 and the opposition of Eastern and Western blocs exacerbated those national oppositions, a fact that is reflected in the question of the recognition of the name of the former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> For a global overview of Macedonia at the end of Ottoman Empire, see Cvijic J., 1906, "Remarques sur l'ethnographie de la Macédoine", *Annales de Géographie*, 15, 80, pp.115-132; Ancel J., 1930, *La Macédoine. Etude de colonisation contemporaine*, Paris: Delagrave; Jelavich B., 1983, *History of the Balkans 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century vol I and II*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. For a global overview of Greek Civil War, see Woodhouse C.M., 2003, *The struggle for Greece 1941-49*, Chicago: Ivan R. Dee Publisher. For a sociological approach to the name problem in Greek Macedonia, see Agelopoulos G., 2005, *Cultures and politics in rural Greek Macedonia*, Dissertation for the PHD, University of Cambridge: Wolfson College. For an anthropological approach to Greek refugees'

Within this context, environmental cross-border cooperation may appear as a good choice: independent of any political or economic stakes, it opens new prospects for tourism. Led by the neutral and scientific legitimacy of ecologists, it satisfies the European Union's goals that seek the pacification of national struggles before the inclusion of Macedonia and Albania among its members<sup>2</sup>.

Indeed, every condition seemed joined together for the implementation of a cross-border "good and unselfish" management programme of the Prespa lakes in 2000, the year of the park's establishment.

But five years later, we are still far from that result. Environmental protection met with difficulties because it took political and economic issues under its wing. It failed in solving them or even in translating them into new terms. The analysis of the difficulties the park is still dealing with on an institutional level reveals this situation.

The explanation of this comes close to the political bias inherent in any institutional construction, even in those based on a strong scientific legitimacy. The pre-eminence of Greece as initiator of the park, as the main provider of experts, and as the only EU Member State, led to the other countries' strategies of resistance, even overriding the protection of nature. And in this game, it seems that nature is playing on the side of Greece.

A second explanation hinges upon the compulsory aspect of the environmental choice. In the actual vision of European integration, there shall be no more subsidies for agricultural development of marginalized rural areas. Environmental protection therefore appears as a "lesser evil" and as a carnival mask that every hyper-marginalised region must wear in order to harvest the funds of rural development policies. If Greece can handle it, it is particularly hard for Albania's and Macedonia's parts of Prespa.

A third explanation is that parts of the local economy rely on informal international cooperation held at a local level. Justified by the existence of an economic gap, this cooperation is sometimes incompatible with environmental protection and often incompatible with any forms of institutionalization. So, as a hegemonic form of institutionalization of trans-

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destiny in Yugoslavia, see Monova M., 2003, *Parcours d'exil, récits de non-retour : les Egéens en République de Macédoine*, Paris: Thèse pour l'obtention du doctorat d'anthropologie de l'EHESS.

<sup>2</sup> As it is clearly quoted in the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe launched in 1999.

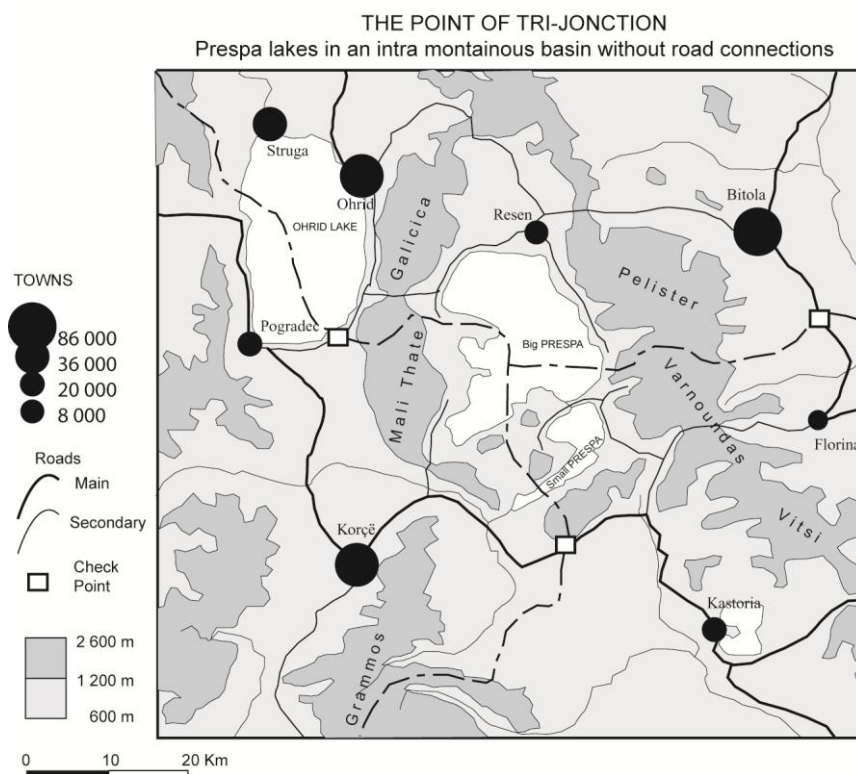
border cooperation, the Prespa Park is highly suspicious in the eyes of some local stakeholders.

## The Assets of the Park: Its Definition as an Original Inhabited Ecosystem with a Common Destiny... and a Stress for Cooperation Whatever the Subject

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Nature appears in Prespa as a good provider of cooperation objects<sup>3</sup>.

**Figure 3**



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<sup>3</sup> Sources for this paragraph mainly consist of scientific reports on fauna and flora written in the 1980s and 1990s. For a global bibliography, see SPP, 2005, *Bibliography of Prespa's references* (on site only).

First, the lakes in themselves - even if they are cut by borderlines - are clearly part of the same ecosystem and a joint water management programme is necessary both in terms of quantity and quality: reports note the high level of fertilizers used in Greece or Macedonia that end up in the lakes, the lack of a sewage system in Macedonia's town of Resen, and the silting up of Mikri Prespa caused by the diversion of the Devoli river into the Albanian part of Mikri Prespa. Once used to irrigate the Albanian plain of Korça, the waters of Prespa still face difficulties that are expressed by the decreasing level of waters in Megali Prespa and the increasing surface of reed banks in Mikri Prespa.

But the water is not the only element that counts: the lakes form the basis of a biotope characteristic of Macedonian mountains. Furthermore, in this region, the lakes represent a highly original spot. The very rare Great White pelican (*Pelecanus onocrotalus*) nests only in Prespa. It has been calculated<sup>4</sup> that the specific biodiversity of Prespa Park is as important as the biodiversity of Germany taken as a whole.

It is easy to understand how nature can be politically used in those conditions: every animal migration path is international by nature, and Prespa can be considered as an area emblematic of the Balkans and unique in itself.

Those arguments appeared clearly in the ecological literature of the 1990's. Furthermore, those same scientific or popularized books often insist on the human dimension of Prespa's originality. The material civilization of Prespa's communities is almost the same even if the dismantlement of this civilization (fishing techniques for example) is not at the same stage in the three parts. Following this scientific literature of the 1990's, the founding declaration of the Prespa Park clearly defines Prespa as an inhabited ecosystem. Nature is therefore considered as the basis of long-term social harmony and as a common value able to re-build the original shared heritage destroyed by the political history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

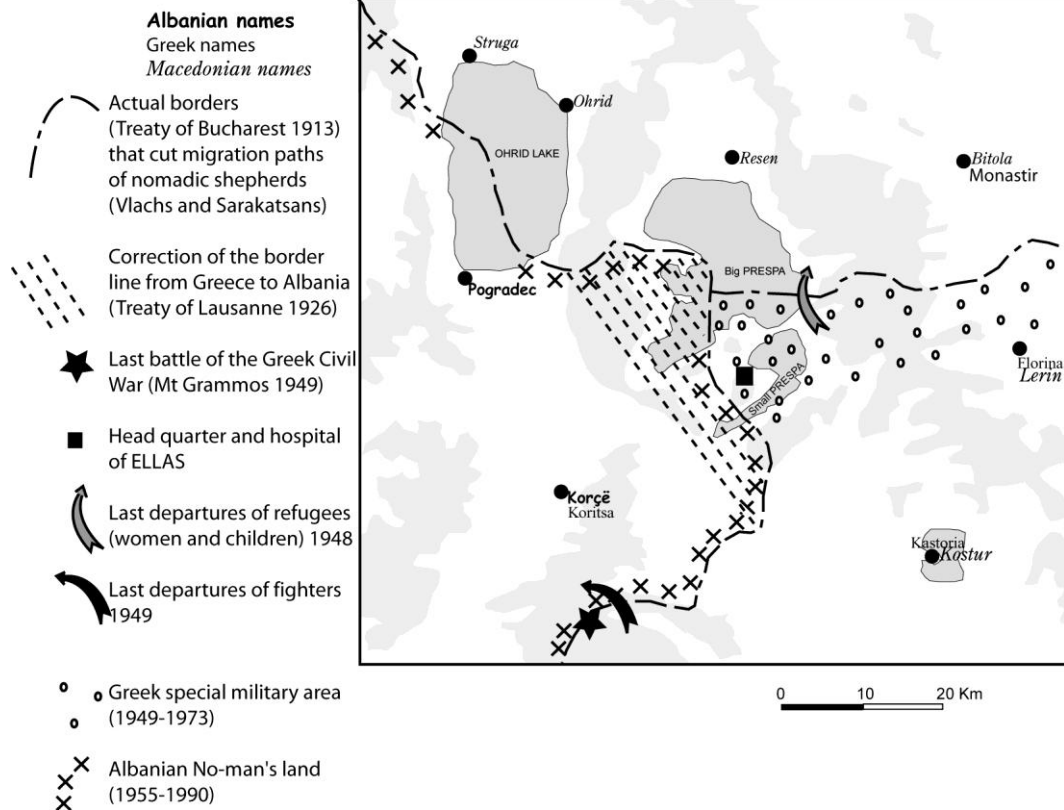
#### Figure 4

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<sup>4</sup> Catsadorakis G., 1999, *Prespa, a Story for Man and Nature*, Athens: Society for the Protection of Prespa/Europrint.



## A territory torn to pieces



Another asset for the Prespa Park is the existence of national traditions of nature preservation in the three countries, even if the modalities of its implementation diverged a lot.

In Albania, the totalitarian state of Enver Hoxha was characterized by its promethean vision of human supremacy over nature. Locally, it modestly led to the diversion of the Devoli river into Mikri Prespa, and the digging of a canal from this lake to the arable Korça plain (continuing a trend of wetland reclamation that began before WWII with the draining of Malik lake on Korça plain). On the other hand, it led to the planting of millions of trees on mountainsides. This stopped quickly after the fall of the regime in 1991. Collective irrigation and draining canals were put out of use (resulting in the formation of a new Malik lake) and forests were destroyed both by locals and city-dwellers from Korça (or even Tirana) in a race for private appropriation of the best part of collective property (resulting in an increasing amount of sediment deposit in Mikri Prespa). Consequently, the present attempt of the Albanian state to rebuild the environment (creation of an Environment Ministry, adhesion to

Prespa Park, creation of a national park in the area) can be based not only on European recommendations, but also on its own experience of previous land use<sup>5</sup>.

In the Macedonian Republic, two National Parks were created during the Yugoslavian period: Galiciça (1949) and Pelister (1960). Those parks are nothing but real: from that time constructions have been forbidden, pastures and logging have been under state regulation. Furthermore, the lakes of Megali Prespa and Ohrid form a kind of Macedonian *Riviera*. The town of Ohrid (43 000 inhabitants) drains huge amounts of inhabitants from Skopje during summer and even winter for the elders. Less popular than Ohrid, Megali Prespa is nevertheless equipped with ageing leisure centers<sup>6</sup>.

In Greece, both the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) encouraged the Colonels' dictatorship to found the first National Park in Prespa in 1972. Even if this led to few realisations, it nevertheless prepared the de-militarization of an area considered to be of strategic interest since the Civil War and the Cold War. Going beyond state strategies, Greek Prespa has had the chance to be the focus of WWF attention since the late 1960s. The network of international ecologists worked successfully to establish the unique value of the pelicans' breeding grounds. It was therefore classified as a RAMSAR site and placed within the network of the Convention on Wetlands. This procured financial and expert support. Some strong scientific personalities left their imprint and not only on paper: the local involvement of Greek biologists led to the establishment in 1989 of the NGO "Society of the friends of Prespa" and, in 1992, to the "Society for the Protection of Prespa" (SPP), an association supported by many European and international institutions that employs 30 people in its headquarters of Agios Germanos, a small village of the area.

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<sup>5</sup> For an analysis of post-communism in Albania, see Champseix E., Champseix J. P., 1992, *L'Albanie ou la logique du désespoir*, Paris: La Découverte. Or Vickers M., Pettifer J., 1997, *Albania from Anarchy to a Balkan Identity*, London: Hurst and co. For its environmental aspects, see Danopoulos C., Kovalevic F., 2000, "Environmental Policy in the Balkans. The Albanian Experience", *Thetis*, VIII, pp.295-301 (Mannheim, Germany).

<sup>6</sup> For Macedonian studies see Polenakovic H., Apostolski M., 1974, *The Socialist Republic of Macedonia*, Skopje: Makedonia review; or Prévélakis G., 1994, *Les Balkans*, Paris: Nathan, 1994.

Beyond those assets, the park presented a strategic opportunity for cooperation: in 2000 the Kosovo war had just finished and very sharp tensions resulted further south dividing Albanian speaking and Macedonian speaking citizens of Macedonia. In addition, the presence in Greece of some 700.000 immigrants (primarily Albanians) caused a debate often turning to racism in spite of a first campaign of regularization<sup>7</sup>. Lastly, the appropriation of the name of Macedonia by the ex-Yugoslavian Republic opened up a period of troubles with Greece. Popular and official reactions have been mostly hostile until today, to a degree that makes it difficult to sign bi- or multilateral treaties involving the two nations.

As the three Prime Ministers stated in their declaration of 2 February 2000, it was urgent to "spare no efforts so that the Prespa Park becomes and remains a model of its kind, as well as an additional reference to the peaceful collaboration among our countries".

## **Permanence of Classic Opposition from States within the Park: A Coordination Committee Dominated by Greece that Survives thanks to International Financial Injections**

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Five years later, little progress can be observed. The park exists only on a formal level: few people are aware of its existence, no concrete realisations can be seen, and no employees have been recruited for educational, tourist or conservation works. No signs single out the park, and there are still no check points allowing one to travel from one country to another.

The spatial extension of the park is still under discussion: should it include Ohrid lake or not? Furthermore, a plethora of other initiatives muddled the issue of transnational cooperation. For example, the East and West Institute and the Council of Europe support a "Prespa-Ohrid Euroregion" project that hardly meets the targets of Prespa Park because of the high number of local actors involved and because of the inclusion of Ohrid.

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<sup>7</sup> For a global analysis of Albanian migration in Greece, see Sintès P., 2005, *Les Albanais en Grèce : mobilités, réseaux et territoires*, Nice: Thèse pour l'obtention du doctorat de géographie de l'Université de Nice.

The main result of five years of work led to the elaboration of a "Strategic Action Plan" (SAP) for the Prespa lakes, 90% of which is the work of the NGO "Society for the Protection of Prespa", but signed by every partner.

Even on a formal level, the park is still fragile: no funds can be raised by a clear managerial authority because the park still does not have a legal personality. The structure that spearheads the park is still the "provisional" coordination committee (CC) that was formed after the common declaration of the three Prime Ministers on 2 February 2000.

They are many explanations for this provisional character of the park. Most of them can be easily discovered in the minutes of the Prespa meetings<sup>8</sup>. Following the trend of multi-level governance that is often operative in other European nature parks, many levels of government and other interests are represented in the committee. Each country sends three representatives: one from the Ministry of the Environment, one from local municipalities, and one from an environmental NGO. The president of the CC is a representative of the international RAMSAR Convention.

Many other stakeholders are present at the meetings: guest institutions such as the EU programmes (Phare, Interreg), UNDP, UNEP, UNESCO as well as pools of national experts (the most important of which is the German cooperation organisation GTZ). So, theoretically, financial partners help equally nine different partners under the supervision of a RAMSAR representative.

But equality is only superficial: Greece appears as the leader of the project because the main experts, the main funding and the main administrative work are undertaken through its state agency and through its NGO network. This network is dominated by WWF-Greece, the local branch of the huge international NGO that has developed links with Greek national authorities ever since the time of the dictatorship.

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<sup>8</sup> At least two times a year, the coordination committee of the Prespa Park meets in one of the three countries, sometimes in main towns (Skopje, Tirana, Thessaloniki), but mostly in the area (Liqenas, Agios Germanos, Resen...). The minutes of those regular and extraordinary meetings provide a good source of information about the difficult institutional constitution of the park. See Prespa Park 2000-2005, *Minutes of the regular (1 to 7) and extraordinary meetings of the Prespa Park Coordination Committee*.

It ends in the continuous silent struggle between "the haves" and "the have-nots", between well and badly connected partners and it is by now well known that - apparently equal - negotiations between unequal partners end in passivity, weak commitments, rapid turn-over of personnel and lack of perception of how representative the institutions are<sup>9</sup>. The case of the Macedonian NGOs that have successively been chosen to participate in the Coordination Committee is a good example of that<sup>10</sup>. So, the more stable and active stakeholders (mostly Greek ecologists) are confronted with the elusive and fluid character of their weaker partners.

In this configuration, the breakdown of Prespa Park's CC has been avoided thanks to the spending of funds: financial partners do not require great results but cannot accept that nothing be done. On many occasions, the minutes of the meetings reveal how a crisis is overcome by a new proposition of financial participation. The elaboration of funding projects therefore occupies the best part of the partners' time and energy<sup>11</sup>.

## **Scientific Arguments Count: How the Park Disciplined Itself on Purely Ecological Questions**

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Those geopolitical and organisational problems are classic and one can therefore easily decode cooperative and resistance strategies through them. But what novelty does ecology bring on the border? Firstly, it brings science into the political discussion: as the Prespa area

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<sup>9</sup> See Jeudy H.P. (eds.), 1996, *Tout négocié, masques et vertiges des compromis*, Paris: Editions Autrement.

<sup>10</sup> The actual NGO has been chosen for unclear reasons by the Macedonian Ministry of Environment when the first Macedonian NGO had been previously created only for the needs of the CC. Causing more problems than solutions, a representative of that first NGO sat for a long time in the CC's administrative secretariat, but it took years for the Macedonian's Ministry of Environment to nominate a new representative; and, curiously, this replacement involved a change of the complete NGO.

<sup>11</sup> The elaboration of the Global Environment Funding project (GEF) of the PNUD is a good example of those funding propositions that took years to be implemented. The redaction of draft papers, short and long term propositions occupied the best part of CC's meetings from 2003 to 2005.

is mainly considered in its ecosystem dimension, political arguments must be translated into the language of ecosystems.

In purely political terms, the question of the extension of the park to the region of Ohrid lake reveals clearly the political oppositions between Greece on one side and Albania and Macedonia on the other. The explanation is quite clear: far less populated than Macedonian and Albanian Prespas, Greece appears quite disadvantaged in demographic terms. If the towns of Ohrid (Rep. of Macedonia, 43 000 in.) and Pogradec (Albania, 35 000 in.) should enter the park, Greece's voice would count for nothing.

Far worse, it would deeply involve this EU country in the question of Albanian-Macedonian misunderstandings. It is not exactly the way Greece dreams of making its comeback in its Balkan hinterland<sup>12</sup>.

But in purely political terms, Greek opposition should have been overcome quite easily: as many promises have not been fulfilled, the Greek state has already shown itself quite ineffective and erratic as a financial partner. Furthermore, there has been a longer experience of Albanian and Macedonian cooperation over Ohrid. Last but not least, in the field, dozens of local NGOs and the Greek local municipalities are not hostile to the extension to Ohrid as it has been shown by the active participation of those partners in the Prespa-Ohrid Euroregion project.

But the fact is that the final choice actually goes toward a smaller park centred on Prespa only. This solution overcame all the others because it is based on stronger ecological arguments. As we will see in analysing the Park's boundaries, nature plays on the side of Greece.

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<sup>12</sup> From 1949 to 1990, the Iron Curtain has frozen a territorial and social puzzle that had largely been constructed by a past military situation, without further legitimization. Greece's boundaries are located so far in the north thanks to the Balkan Wars in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1949, the Greek Civil War led to the expulsion of most of the Slavic populations from those northern areas. During the 1990s, Greece's territorial integrity has not been contested but Greece remains very touchy on this point. In contrast, many private or semi private investors get a foothold in Bulgaria and, more recently, in Albania and Macedonia. Those economic aspects are sometimes over-evaluated but still represent the main Greek focus. This is the reason why the Greek town of Thessalonica is sometimes presented as the "Capital of the Eastern Balkans".

The first real agreement of the different partners is the signature of the Strategic Action Plan (SAP<sup>13</sup>) for Prespa. In this document, the first subject of concern is the quality and quantity of the lakes' water, because water summarizes the main ecological problems of the region: agricultural and urban uses of water, water levels, and fish and bird populations. This special interest in water led to the definition of the local ecosystem through the factor of water circulation. Quite easily, the catchment area of the rivers flowing toward Prespa basin imposed itself as the map of Prespa Park in the first version of the SAP. Albania and Macedonia replied arguing that their own traditions of nature protection should be respected and that Macedonian protected areas should not be divided because they are only partly included in Prespa's catchment area. The Greek NGO SPP accepted the argument and the SAP quickly quoted that Galiciça and Pelister natural parks should be entirely comprised within the Prespa Park.

Beyond that point, Albanian and Macedonian scientific arguments became too hazy to impose the extension to Ohrid. Arguing that an ecosystem is a system, the Macedonian Ministry and the NGO refused to define the spatial extension on water only: complexity should have been taken into account, and, on that point, Prespa and Ohrid were supposed to be part of a unique ecosystem that should not be divided. The strength of the argument is in its theoretical evidence, but the SPP easily replied arguing about the concrete impossibility of drawing boundaries for an ecosystem: it would have meant so many studies that it could not have been undertaken by Macedonian and Albanian scientific partners. On the other hand, the Greek NGO argued on clear and documented facts. In the SPP's view, an ecosystem just limited to Prespa does exist because of its uniqueness: sole breeding ground of the Great White Pelican, unique biotope of well-studied endemic animal and plant species, almost all of them depending on the question of water.

The circle was therefore closed: thanks to scientific studies of the pelicans' habits (let's say thanks to the international ecologist network), water was put at the centre, and ecosystem-based delimitations left on the bench. Nature-based network wins, peacemakers-based network loses. The force of the Greek environmental NGOs supported by the international ecologist network remained and points today toward a smaller and easily manageable park.

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<sup>13</sup> Prespa Park, 2005, *Strategic Action Plan for the sustainable development of the Prespa Park*.  
Gardin Jean

But this force now also implies a weakness. As the main tasks are decided on strong naturalist arguments, the Prespa Park remains closed on purely ecological matters, and that explains the little interest of Albanian and Macedonian partners. Who really cares about nature in a particularly poor area of states under economic perfusion? On the Greek side, the honest ecological attitude of the SPP meets by chance the government's resisting strategies: beyond nature, no more cooperation is wanted.

There is a direct conclusion to this ecological enclosure of the debate: the language of the environment will not translate the difficult issues of the political, cultural and economic situation into pacified objects of negotiation.

## **Beyond the Formalization of Negotiations over Nature, the Permanence of Informal Economic and Social Collaborations**

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In a way, the rejection of the park's ability to undertake economic and political cooperation may even satisfy different stakeholders. In their attempt to catch public financial support, local governments and NGOs are formally engaged in a park that does not restrain any action: "better that than nothing" could they say. But if the park should interfere with economic interests, it could as well be dropped. Agriculture provides quite an illuminating case study.

Because of its plantations of fruit trees, the region of Resen (main town of Macedonian Prespa with 8.000 inhabitants) was formerly a rich region compared to the rest of Macedonia. On this basis, a strong industry developed, producing different food products and selling them throughout Yugoslavia. The main markets are now closed but agriculture remains the strongest base of local activity, as well as in Albania. As long as these countries do not belong to the EU, exports to Greece depend on national or local formal or informal agreements: for example, export quotas of Macedonian water melons are fixed every year at a governmental



level. On the other side of the border, flocks of Albanian sheep enter into Greece illegally in order to be sold on the European market with the complicity of Prespa's inhabitants and veterinary surgeons.

Furthermore, Greek agriculture relies directly on the cheap labour of Albanian migrants. In Prespa, a bean monoculture that has developed since the 1960s is particularly endangered: manual work is irreplaceable, arable lands are rare, consumption centres are far away, comparative advantages are low.

Albanian workers therefore represent the only chance of survival. Hundreds of workers cross the frontier for spring and autumn work. When they do not stay permanently for various purposes (mostly looking after cattle, mechanical and building works, etc.), they inhabit ruins and abandoned houses for some periods or commute daily to Albania.

The labour market of illegal workers is organized on a local basis, with very rapid connections between persons that usually know one another personally.

Those Albanians are Macedonian speaking. This fact gives them an opportunity to fit in with the local economy without having to learn Greek, since about 30% of Greek Prespa inhabitants are from Macedonian-speaking families. Migrant workers made Macedonian the professional language of bean production in Greek Prespa. The other communities of Greek Prespa<sup>14</sup> therefore have to learn a bit of Macedonian to explain the day-to-day agricultural tasks.

The fact may be both local and tenuous, but the emotional charge of it can not be denied: Albanian workers regularly meet in small groceries headed by Macedonian speaking Greek families. There they meet their Greek employers for various professional or social purposes. It is sometimes the occasion for expressing - in Macedonian - a new formulation of cultural international identities: "Prespa is a brotherhood", "here we are all Prespan".

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<sup>14</sup> About 30% of the population is Greek speaking, originally settled in the 1920s and 1930s, moving from Asia Minor. The rest of the population (30%) are Vlachs (originally Vlach-speaking) settled in Prespa during the 1950s moving from central Greece with government aid in order to secure the boundary with a numerous and loyal population. See Ancel, 1930, *op. cit.* and Catsadorakis, 1999, *op. cit.*.

This formulation of a common local identity is less dangerous than the political claim of the recognition of a Macedonian national identity by the Greek State (simply unimaginable). It is also more effective even if it does not seem to involve the other Greek or Vlach-speaking communities much because several bones of contention remain strong. Nevertheless, it shows how things can evolve locally when they're not formalized under state control.

On the other hand, Prespa Park survives only by keeping those local informal agreements at a distance. For example, the official language of the meetings is English, and the question of cross-border migration is rarely mentioned, and then only to be condemned in the name of a quite theoretical "living and working in the village" argument.

The importance of agriculture shows how it may be difficult to accept the establishment of an effective natural park that would put restrictions upon intensive agricultural practices (for example, the use of fertilizers and pesticides). Furthermore, part of this informal agricultural cooperation relies on the economic gap between each side of those supposed-closed boundaries: If the park succeeded in opening check points, in reducing the economic gap, in giving migrant workers a legal status, then Greek Prespa's agriculture may suffer a lot.

## Conclusion

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In that sense, cooperation over the environment is at a crossroad: shall Prespa accept the death of its agriculture in the name of environmental protection? In a way, the choice does not depend on local people: the actual evolution of the new Common Agricultural Policy of the EU gives little hope to the agricultural activities of this kind in remote mountainous areas. Prices are supposed to reach the world market level by 2013 and rural development policies are supposed to take over from agricultural aid<sup>15</sup>. As no membership procedure has been engaged, neither Albania nor Macedonia will be integrated into the EU at this time. That

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<sup>15</sup> See Commission Européenne, 2004, *La politique agricole commune - Synthèse 2003*, Luxembourg: Office des publications officielles des Communautés Européennes.

means that when integration becomes effective, the environment will be the only way to receive some funds. Will it be enough? The Greek Prespa experience is of little interest for this area because it carries a very low human density: green tourism may be enough in this country and of very little interest in the others.

In an optimistic attempt, we could simply state that the experience of the international Prespa Park may serve as an experimental essay in realizing the integration of marginalized borders of the EU through the environment. And so, Prespa's success and failures could help to improve EU policy toward nature protection and rural development in an enlarged Europe. For example, the experiences led by the Society for the Protection of Prespa for the integration of agricultural and environmental interests in Greek Prespa have built upon the evolution of the interest of the ecologists' network: from birds to water, from water to land use, from land use to human activities<sup>16</sup>. Shall it be of any interest in Albania or Macedonia?

If not, the present disconnection of environmental protection from real economic interests of local stakeholders will keep the area in a subservient position with respect to state representation in the projects implemented in Prespa. On the other hand, the social repercussions of local agreements over agriculture show that the informal trans-boundary economic networks represent a more significant factor for future development.

Nevertheless, as other rural studies have shown<sup>17</sup>, the fact is that those informal networks are controlled by local or national key stakeholders that take advantages of their position (border police, labour managers, veterinary surgeons, etc.). So it would be meaningless to oppose artificial strategies in terms of scales: local *versus* global, Prespan cross strategies *versus* states' resisting strategies. More important would be a complete

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<sup>16</sup> A new spillway has been constructed in order to control the water level in Mikri Prespa. It has been financed through a European LIFE project for the protection of rare birds. It led to new experiments of land management (mainly the reed banks regulation) and to the experimentation with buffalo husbandry for the management of wet meadows.

<sup>17</sup> For a Greek example, see Vounouki E., 2004, *La reproduction des exploitations agricoles en Grèce. Deux études de cas pour la remise en question du modèle agricole grec*, Nanterre: Thèse pour l'obtention du doctorat de sociologie de l'Université Paris X Nanterre. In the same area, EU agricultural subsidies can diffuse within a horizontal network of relatives (helping the survival of numerous exploitations) or lead to the concentration of a small number of farms dominated in a vertical network.

analysis of the way informal and formal networks tie in connections, from agriculture to the environment.

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